

Council 4 AFSCME Testimony
Re: SB 669, HB 5895, 5900, 5904

GAE Committee

2/22/13

My name is Brian Anderson. I am a legislative representative for Council 4 AFSCME, a union of 32,000 Connecticut public and private employee members. Many of our members are active in the two major parties, but also in third parties. Council 4 opposes S.B. No. 669, AN ACT CONCERNING MINOR PARTIES AND TRANSPARENCY OF ELECTIONS

On a more personal note, I also oppose this bill. I am very active in the Democratic party. I serve as a Democratic State Central Committee member. I used to be a Republican Party member. Quite frequently, I have interacted with third party members on political and policy issues.

I strongly believe in the two party system. It forces people of disparate views to work together.

Our Country's political history persuasively demonstrates that there is an important place for third parties. Their role in shaping reform has been significant. Moreover, they stimulate public participation in our government. There are people who are deeply concerned about their community but simply can't support certain positions adopted by the two major parties. These people find the third party to be an important option. They deserve to have some voice and they deserve the right to organize into third parties if they so choose. Neither major party should attempt to eliminate this important institution in America's unique and successful form of democracy.

The premise of this bill is that third parties should be treated under the law in the exact same manner as the two major parties for internal organization. I disagree because third parties are vastly different than the two major parties.

If I remember correctly the Democratic Party represents about 780,000 members statewide. The Republican Party represents about 430,000 members statewide. The next biggest party is probably the Green Party with about 1,500 members. Size alone makes these parties quite different.

We already treat the major parties and minor parties in different ways under the law. There are very different standards for qualifying for public financing. The major parties must reach a certain dollar donation level and receive donations from a certain number of donors. The minor parties must do this, but additionally must secure signatures from a certain percentage of voters. The public financing levels received by major party candidates are higher than those received by minor party candidates. I think that this is fair. The major parties represent far more citizens.

If we force the minor parties to abide by exactly the same governance rules as major parties, do we not strengthen the argument made not so long ago in court, that minor parties should receive the same public financing amount as the major party candidates? I think that it would be ridiculous if the Green Party or Working Families Party received \$3 million in public funding for a gubernatorial candidate. They do not represent a broad enough segment of the public to warrant such a figure. Yet, this bill seems to take us down that road.

There is no evidence of any wrong doing by a minor party. There is no logical basis for this dramatic change. But there is reason to limit the names a third party may use. For example, no third party should be allowed to use a name that has the potential of misleading voters. For example, "The Republic Party" or the "Democrat" Party is too similar and bound to cause voter error.

Council 4 also supports:

Proposed H.B. No. 5900 AN ACT REQUIRING MORE TRANSPARENCY IN EDUCATION.

This bill makes state educational contracting more transparent. It is important to assure taxpayers that there money is being spent wisely.

Proposed H.B. No. 5895 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A SICK LEAVE BANK FOR MUNICIPAL FIRST RESPONDERS.

Council 4 supports with amendment:

Proposed H.B. No. 5904 AN ACT CONCERNING A SICK LEAVE BANK FOR MUNICIPAL FIRST RESPONDERS.

These two bills establish a sick bank for firemen, police and emergency services personnel. We urge that these bills be amended to include all municipal employees. As we have seen with the recent tragedy in Newtown, that paraprofessionals, nurses, maintenance workers, police and fire dispatchers and others can be adversely affected by tragedies.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.